2:Man G-5 (1869-1880)1932 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

619 neighbouring tribe, an express invitation or permission is required,
unless, indeed, the party entering happens to be accompanied by
486 one or more members of the district visited, or when, from long and friendly intercommunication, a right of way has been tacitly sanctioned. In cases where there has been a breach of this observance sharp retribution has generally followed, causing sometimes serious loss of life, and resulting in a long-standing tribal feud.

619 3. Those communities of *ē·rem-tâ·ga-* and *àryô·to-*, living
within a few miles of each other and speaking the same dialect,
578 arrange from time to time large gatherings—generally numbering
437 about a hundred persons[1]—for purposes of barter, or for the celebration of some particular event. Though not unfrequently on these occasions old enmities are healed and friendships formed, fresh tribal feuds and personal quarrels sometimes originate in consequence of a misunderstanding or dispute over some comparative trifle.[2]

487 4. There are numerous paths intersecting each territory, the result of continuous traffic over the same ground. When, for some reason, a new course is taken through the jungle, the route is indicated to those following by bending the twigs of the brushwood in a *reverse* direction at intervals along the track. This is especially the case during the dry season, when, owing to the parched condition of the soil, there is some difficulty in distinguishing footprints.[3]

212 5. No marks on rocks, trees or other objects, made for purposes of record, are believed by them to exist, and, with the exception of the supposititious hieroglyphics,[4] hereafter to be mentioned, nothing of the nature of writing is to be found among these tribes, nor have they any method of recording the name and exploits of a deceased chief or other individual who may have gained distinction during his life, save the narration —more or less garbled—of the same by their admiring descendants. The messenger who conveys intelligence to a distant encampment bears no outward token with him to testify to the authenticity or character of the communication he has to make.

211 6. Although no method of signs exists, such as tying knots in
a string, making notches in a tally, or figures on wood, bark, or
411 stone, they have means of distinguishing arrows and spears belonging to one another, by certain differences peculiar to each

[1] It is believed that no larger number than 300 has ever been assembled at one time in any place in our vicinity, at least since our advent.

[2] *Vide post* "Games and Amusements," paragraphs 24 and 37.

[3] No prejudice exists in respect to crossing water, going by certain paths, or handling particular objects, excepting the *Anadendrum paniculatum*. *Vide post*, Part III, "String," paragraph 3.

[4] *Vide* "Mythology," paragraph 29.

2:Man G-5 (1869-1880)1932 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

individual in the method of tying and knotting the string employed in the manufacture of these missiles;[1] these, however, are often so slight that, even when pointed out, they are scarcely to be detected by a stranger, unless he be one who has bestowed careful attention to the subject.

7. In their savage state they never attempt to represent any object, and, though they do not appear to possess any natural taste for drawing, they differ from the Australians[2] in the intelligence they display in recognising any familiar form depicted in a sketch; and while no such method for indicating the situation of any place is known or employed among themselves, some of them are quick in understanding a chart of their own country, and are able to point out the sites of their various encampments.

8. It is hardly necessary to state that they have nothing answering to mile-stones or roadside marks. Swamps are never crossed, but in all cases avoided by circuitous routes; experience seems to have taught them the natural line of fords from salient to salient banks, and, when a creek has to be crossed, they always avail themselves of the advantages thus afforded, even making a detour in order to do so.[3] This applies, however, to those occasions when they are not heavily laden, or are carrying articles liable to be damaged by immersion, or which would hinder them from swimming.

Swimming.—1. With the exception of some of the *ē·rem-tâ·ga-*,[4] a knowledge of the art of swimming is common to members of both sexes; the *children* even, learning almost as soon as they can run, speedily acquire great proficiency. In this accomplishment the Andamanese greatly surpass the majority of Europeans, but it is probable that, in competition with an experienced English swimmer, their best men would be distanced in the first few hundred yards, it being not so much for speed, as for the length of time they can remain in the water, that they are remarkable.

[1] With reference to this circumstance, it may be mentioned that, a few years ago (1876), five aborigines, concerned in the murder near Kyd Island of some Chinese traders with whom they had had a dispute, were discovered by means of the arrows found on the spot, as these were identified by some of their acquaintances then living at Port Blair.

[2] Brown. [From remarks, however, contained in a recent article, entitled "The Indo-Chinese and Oceanic Races," by Mr. A. H. Keane, which appeared in "Nature" (Jan. 6th, 1881), it would appear that the low estimate of the Australian intellect formed by certain ethnologists is not shared by all, and "many instances are given of their skill even in drawing, a capacity for which was wholly denied them."]

[3] Wells are not dug, but when encamping, whether for days or months, care is always taken that the spot selected be near some fresh-water stream.

[4] The reason of this is obvious, as it is known that the majority of the creeks are fordable in many places within three miles of the coast, even in the rainy season, and, therefore, the necessity of acquiring the art of natation has never been experienced by those permanently resident in the interior.

the Onges as hiding-places or temporary shelters. In these cavities, which remain full of water right through the dry season, flourish a horde of amphibia, many hitherto unknown.

The great trees are sometimes so close together that it is literally impossible to pass between them, yet it is rare to find two of the same species next to each other, so great is the variety. Huge clumps of ferns are everywhere, hiding the roots of dying trees, hundreds of years old, and fallen trunks rotting on the ground. Some of the thicker and taller trees protect themselves from the monsoon gales by developing buttresses, usually four or six to a tree, which stand out from the trunk like right-angled triangles, with the apex about ten metres from the ground. If a blanket is stretched between the sloping sides of two of the buttresses one can improvise a shelter which is extremely comfortable by local standards, and both man and animals take advantage of this natural cover; I myself took shelter like this on many occasions. (They need to be treated with caution, however, as the local snakes have a predilection for siestas in the darkest corners.) If a hard piece of wood is struck against one of the buttresses it echoes hollowly, and the Andamanese often make use of them to transmit warning messages over considerable distances, using a form of code. A few beats can make every inhabitant within a wide radius vanish from sight, hastily making for the nearest hiding-place. It is hopeless to try and ferret them out once they have been warned, and there is always a risk of being killed by one of their arrows in the process.

Sometimes the Onges used to disappear suddenly for fun. The blackness of their skin is a great help in this, since even on the brightest afternoon it is intensified by the obscurity of the forest. One has a disturbing sensation of being entirely alone, yet knowing that dozens of pairs of eyes are watching as the Onges glide silently from trunk to trunk between the buttresses.

The whole island is a mass of knotted vegetation, and it is useless to attempt to cut any form of lasting path, as the plants immediately grow back. 'Walking' in the Andamans therefore means opening up a way with a hatchet, unless one adopts the rapid but exhausting Onge method of swinging over obstacles by the lianas. This is the kingdom of the epiphytes. The lianas cover their hosts as if determined to hide them, and clumps of orchids hang from nearly every trunk, although their flowers are unfortunately very small.

11: Cipriani E-3 (1951-1955) 1966 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

CHAPTER THREE

The Spirits of the Forest

●487 It is only too easy to get lost in the forests, but this never happens with the Onges. They do not rely upon the 'mysterious sense of direction' which is often attributed (without adequate evidence) to primitive peoples; they have other simpler but equally effective ways of finding their way. Everywhere the Onges go they leave behind some mark. When they come to a halt in the depths of the forest, they cast around them, and soon find signs leading to some temporary shelter or communal hut.

As the Onges are out in the forest every day, there are traces of their passage everywhere. Inconspicuously broken plants, or scratches on the branches of trees are precious marks, one leading to the next and so on to the camp. Everyone takes care not to get lost, and moves carefully through the sea of vegetation, without appearing to mark their way. I have often been surprised to find myself back at the camp after innumerable twists and turns, but the [151] Onges' exceptional eyesight saved us when the situation seemed to me quite hopeless.

805 They were always able, too, to calculate exactly how far to go in one stage, and could invariably tell me precisely when we should arrive at a given point. They have no form of clock and work solely by the sun's position. But whatever their method, every time I asked when we should reach a certain camp, they always replied at great length: they would point with one outstretched arm to *Tenculu* the Sun and then with the other to where it would be when we arrived. The passing of days was indicated by moving an arm from east to west, saying *Tenculu – Tenculu*, to show sunrise and sunset. It was a simple matter to work out what they meant, and their answer was invariably right.